DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 470 756 EA 032 051

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TITLE	Creating Ethical Administrators: A Challenge for Both Professor and Practitioner.
PUB DATE	2002-02-00
NOTE	12p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Association of School Administrators (San Diego, CA, February 14-17, 2002).
PUB TYPE	Reports - Evaluative (142) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Administrator Education; Educational Improvement; Elementary Secondary Education; *Ethics; Higher Education; Leadership Training; Mentors; Modeling (Psychology); Role Models
IDENTIFIERS	*Texas

ABSTRACT

Perhaps one of the greatest gaps present in the training of education leaders nationwide is that of ethics. Leaders in education have very little, if any, training in ethics. Few programs for preparing educational leaders incorporate any study of ethics into the curriculum. A survey featuring 10 ethical scenarios was given to students across Texas who are currently enrolled in educational leadership programs; data were also collected on the students' age, years of experience, and previous training in ethics. No individual factors, such as age, experience, gender, position, or past training, were found to contribute to a lack of understanding of ethics. Although respondents ranged from 10 percent to 100 percent correct, 71.6 percent scored 60 percent or lower, and 86.4 percent scored 70 percent or lower. These results make a dismal statement about ethical awareness among administrators. To remedy this deficiency, it is recommended that ethics be introduced into educator preparation programs, that administrators who are strong models in ethical behavior act as mentors, that professional organizations assist in the development and maintenance of high ethical standards among educational leaders, and that reflective practice in ethics be made a part of administrator education and professional development. (Contains 11 references.) (RT)

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Running Head: CREATING ETHICAL ADMINISTRATORS

Creating Ethical Administrators: A Challenge for both Professor and Practitioner

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Paper presented for the
American Association of School Administrators Annual Conference

San Diego, California
February, 2002

EA 032 051

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CREATING ETHICAL ADMINISTRATORS: A CHALLENGE FOR BOTH PROFESSOR AND PRACTITIONER

> Ethics are principles of conduct strongly influencing the actions of individuals, groups, or organizations. A study of the "ethical" is concerned with standards for judging "rightness" or "wrongness" of human conduct. Ethical conduct may be either consciously controlled or may be subscribed to through subconscious dispositions. Ethics approximate values. Ethical considerations may not necessarily be what "is" conscionable standards which are determined by a specific society, culture, or influence of other particular groups. Therefore, rightness or wrongness imply and express certain "norms" or principles of conduct in a given circumstance (Walker, 1999, p.2).

Perhaps one of the greatest gaps present in the training of educational leaders is that of ethics. Previously, ethics has received little attention from professional organizations and even less attention in educator preparation programs. Leaders in education have very little, if any, training in ethics (Beck & Murphy, 1994). With increasing levels of accountability and complexity for school administrators, these gaps in ethics training must be addressed. The need for ethical administrators is reaching pervasive and critical dimensions. Knezevich (1970) explains this critical need by stating, "Every profession has had to fill the breach between what is morally right and what simply satisfies the letter of the law. Professional behavior must be guided by recognized ethical principles of practitioners for the statutes of the state or nation are often silent on what shall prevail in many sensitive and crucial matters" (p. 17).

Who's to Blame

The lack of ethical administrators in part demonstrates a shortcoming on the part of educator preparation programs, including administrator preparation programs for principals and superintendents. Few educator preparation programs incorporate any study of ethics into the curriculum. Those programs that do offer coursework on ethics often do so at the doctoral level, meaning that the master's degree courses most often taken by aspiring principals and superintendents offer no training in ethical decision-making.

Furthermore, very little administrative or educational theory focuses on ethics. In fact, ethics has held at best a minor role in administrative theory (Dunigan & Mac Pherson, 1992). It is unreasonable to expect students to learn about something that is not adequately addressed in theory or in the literature.

Ethical standards and codes have been implemented by professional educator organizations for every level of school administrators. For example, as the American Association of School Administrators (AASA) publishes a code of ethics for its members, typically school superintendents. Likewise, the National Association for Secondary School Principals (NASSP), the National Association for Elementary School Principals (NAESP), and National Middle School Association (NMSA) all publish ethical standards for their respective members. Ethical standards exist for every one of the major organizations representing every level of school administrators. Yet, little if any training takes place to ensure that the members are even aware of these standards,

much less any sort of emphasis for members on incorporating these standards into their daily actions.

Thus, not only are administrators untrained in ethics by their administrator preparation programs, but they also receive little or no support for ethical behavior through their supporting organizations. These organizations should implement some type of awareness program among their respective members to ensure that all members are aware of and practicing these ethical standards (Czaja, Fisher, & Hutto, 2001). It is easy to see from where the gap in creating ethical administrators stems. Ethical standards are in place; now it is time to put them into practice.

The value of ethics among our school leaders is evident through other avenues as well. The National Policy Board for Educational Administration includes a unit on values in its curriculum for training principals (Thompson, 1994), and the Interstate Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) devotes one of its six standards entirely to the need for building ethical leaders (Green, as cited in Czaja, 2001). Likewise, the State Board for Educator Certification (SBEC) in Texas adopted a revised Educator Code of Ethics in 1998, and the Texas Administrative Code (TAC, 1999) outlines specific expectations for all persons certified as educational leaders, regardless of whether they serve at the campus or district level. These expectations include the following:

> Learner-Centered Values and Ethics of Leadership. A principal is an educational leader who promotes the success of all students by acting with integrity and fairness, and in an ethical manner. At the campus level, a principal understands, values, and is able to:

1. Model and promote the highest standard of conduct, ethical principles, and integrity in decision-making, actions, and behaviors.
2. Implement policies and procedures that encourage all campus personnel to comply with Chapter 247 of this title relating to Code of Ethics and Standard Practices for Texas Educators.
3. Model and promote the continuous and appropriate development of all learners in the campus community.
4. Promote awareness of learning differences, multicultural awareness, gender sensitivity, and ethnic appreciation in the campus community.
5. Articulate the importance of education in a free democratic society.

Similar standards are set forth in Chapter 242 of the Texas Administrative Code for superintendents.

In spite of the efforts of professional organizations and state offices to produce codes of ethics, Dexheimer (1969) noted long ago that "there is a significant discrepancy between acceptance of a professional code of ethics and adherence to that code in actual practice by chief school administrators. " (p. 56). In other words, simply having a code of ethics for administrators to follow is not enough. Adherence to these codes, or putting ethics into practice rather than simply into nice words, must become a primary goal of both administrator preparation programs as well as practicing administrators.

A Closer Look at Ethics in Practice

Developing administrative leaders who are ethical and able to make ethical decisions is critical to the future of education. Research taken from students in eight educational leadership programs across Texas provides an understanding of just how

important an ethics curriculum is in creating successful future administrators (Czaja, Fisher, & Hutto, 2001). A survey of ten ethical scenarios was given to students across Texas who are currently enrolled in educational leadership programs; data were also collected on the students' age, years of experience, and previous training in ethics. The results demonstrate an overwhelming shortcoming in ethical awareness on the part of educational leadership students across the state. These students represent the state's future leaders and administrators in education, indicating that the challenge now exists to create ethical administrators.

No individual factors – age, experience, gender, position, or past training – were found to contribute to a lack of understanding of ethics (Czaja, Fisher, & Hutto, 2001). Total scores for respondents, most of whom are full time educators (some teachers, some already in administrative positions), ranged from 10% correct to 100% correct. However, 71.6% of respondents scored 60% or lower, and 86.4% scored 70% or lower. Thus, a mere 14% of respondents scored 80% or better on correctly answering 10 ethical dilemmas. These results make a dismal statement about ethical awareness among administrators.

Solving this Problem and Creating Ethical Administrators

Clearly there is a gap in ensuring that practicing and aspiring administrators are properly trained in ethics. Strategies for closing this gap are essential.

Increased awareness of ethics and ethical standards can be achieved through the use of reflective practice. Brown and Irby's (1997) reflection model asks students – and/or leaders, as the case may be – to analyze, appraise, and transform information from their experiences. In other words, students must be able to apply their knowledge of

ethical standards to everyday practice. How does ethics play a role in their current educational position? How will that role change as an administrator? How do these potential leaders ensure that they make ethical decisions? The reflection cycle allows students (and practicing administrators) to analyze situations, make effective and appropriate decisions about those situations, and experience personal growth as a result. Brown and Irby (1997) point out that using reflection results in administrators who share the following characteristics (p.26-27):

1. they view self assessment and reflection as priorities for school improvement
2. they recognize that external and internal challenges result in growth
3. they intentionally engage in activities aimed at challenging current beliefs and practice and expanding understandings
4. they understand that change is inevitable
5. they recognize that chaos often accompanies change
6. they share understandings with colleagues

All of these effective administrator characteristics assist in the development of ethical administrators.

Just as teaching the use of self reflection should occur in the administrator preparation classroom, early program courses in educational theory should likewise include ethical considerations. This can be accomplished in several ways: integrating ethics into the existing curriculum (Fey & Kelly, 1996), changing current teaching strategies (English & Steffy, 1997), and/or creating specific courses on ethics (Beck & Murphy, 1994; Czaja & Lowe, 2000). The classical organization theories – such as scientific management, behavioral science theories, and human relations theories - that

are currently standard in educational leadership classrooms do not lend much discussion to ethical considerations. Including theories that involve the study of ethics and ethical principles allows students to discuss and reflect about this very important aspect of education reality.

Professional organizations should also assist in the development and maintenance of high ethical standards among educational leaders. These organizations all publish their own code of ethics, yet very little emphasis is given to these ideas beyond their mere existence. Professional development offerings and training should be made available both to new administrators as well as to veterans in the field. Membership in these organizations could even be tied in some way to adherence to the respective code of ethics.

Practicing school administrators can also help in creating future ethical administrators. By mentoring new administrators and engaging them in discussions about ethical dilemmas and decision-making, principals and superintendents can make a difference in new administrators' development of high ethical standards. Modeling ethical behavior is also of utmost importance. Just like children learn more from watching what their parents do than listening to what they say, adults learn a great deal from observing the behavior of others as well. The old adage, *do as I say, not as I do*, unfortunately does no good in developing ethical administrators. Modeling of appropriate ethical behavior is key.

Conclusion

In a day where high stakes testing for students is the norm and educator accountability for such test results is at its peak, the need for ethical administrators is

clear. Likewise, the fact that school districts are often the largest employer in town and administrators are responsible for running million dollar budgets further demonstrates why school leaders need a firm grasp on ethical standards of behavior. Walker (1999) expounds upon the importance of ethical behavior among administrators in this way:

> The importance of ethical decision-making on the part of a school superintendent cannot be underestimated. The school superintendent is the highest administrator in a school district. He or she serves as the leader of the organization. The ethical behavior of the school superintendent has considerable impact on the ethical behavior of others in the organization. The greatest harm caused by unethical behavior falls upon the students. The consequences of such behavior by a school superintendent may include the loss of educational quality for thousands of students. A discussion of the ethical behavior of school administrators is much broader in scope than the sensational acts of unethical conduct that make the headlines of the newspaper. Making sound ethical decisions is not always an easy task. There are often 'gray areas' in important decisions which must be made by a school superintendent" (p. 4).

A need to further the effort to develop effective ethical leaders exists nationwide. Reflective practice provides an effective avenue for such professional growth and development. Likewise, introducing ethics into educator preparation programs is essential. Strong ethical role models in administration are also of utmost importance. These suggestions offer a means for meeting one of the most important challenges currently faced by both higher education preparation programs as well as public schools, the challenge of creating ethical administrators.

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